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# THE THING

1ST

COLLECTOR'S  
ITEM ISSUE



# LIFELINES



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SCRIPTER PENCILLER INKER LETTERER COLORIST EDITOR EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



UNBIDDEN, A WAVE OF GRIM  
NOSTALGIA CRASHES ACROSS THE  
THING. VOICES SPEAK MEMORIES  
FROM SHADOWED CORNERS.



THE GHOSTS OF OLD TIMES  
FLOAT BEFORE HIM. THE SMELL  
OF COOKING CABBAGE TEASES  
HIS NOSE... A PHANTOM.

NO ONE LIVES  
HERE NOW.

THE CRACKED AND  
PEELING WALLS ARE  
AS DRY AND DEAD AS  
THE MEMORIES THEY  
EVOKE. THIS PART OF  
HIS LIFE IS GONE.

GONE FOREVER.

THEN HE  
HEARS THEM...

VOICES...?

NO MORE THAN  
HALF-SENSED  
MURMURS,  
VAGUE AND  
INCOMPRE-  
HENSIBLE.

THERE'S  
SOMEBODY IN  
THE BASEMENT.  
SOMEBODY...

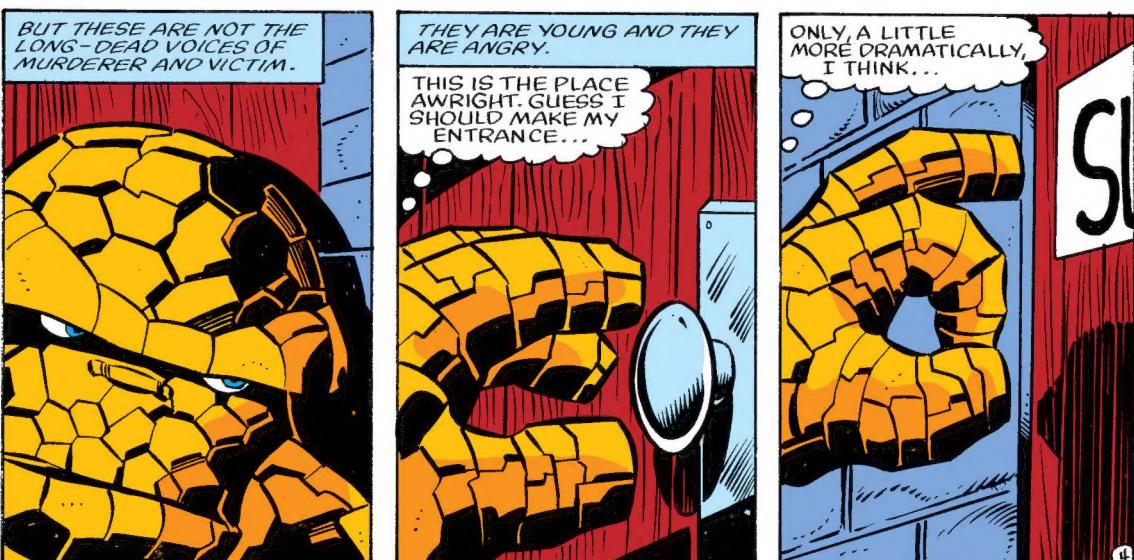
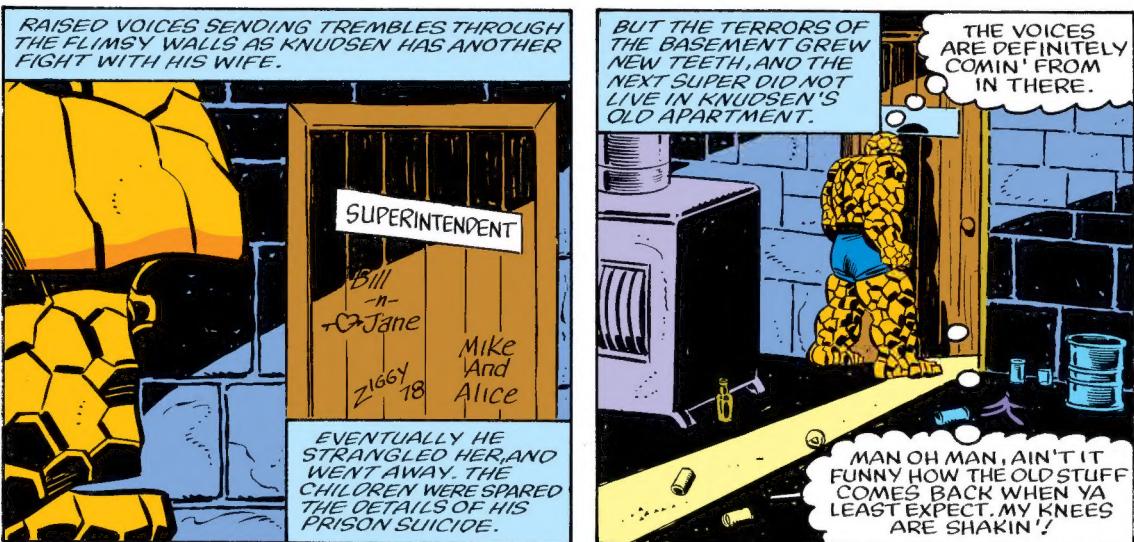
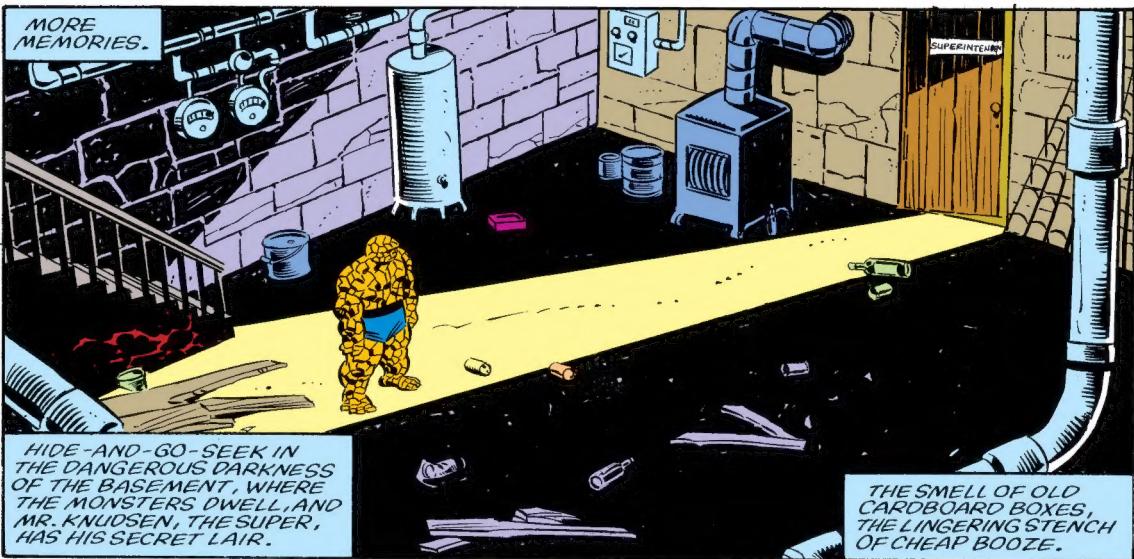
--THE GHOSTS  
SEEM SUDDENLY  
VERY REAL.

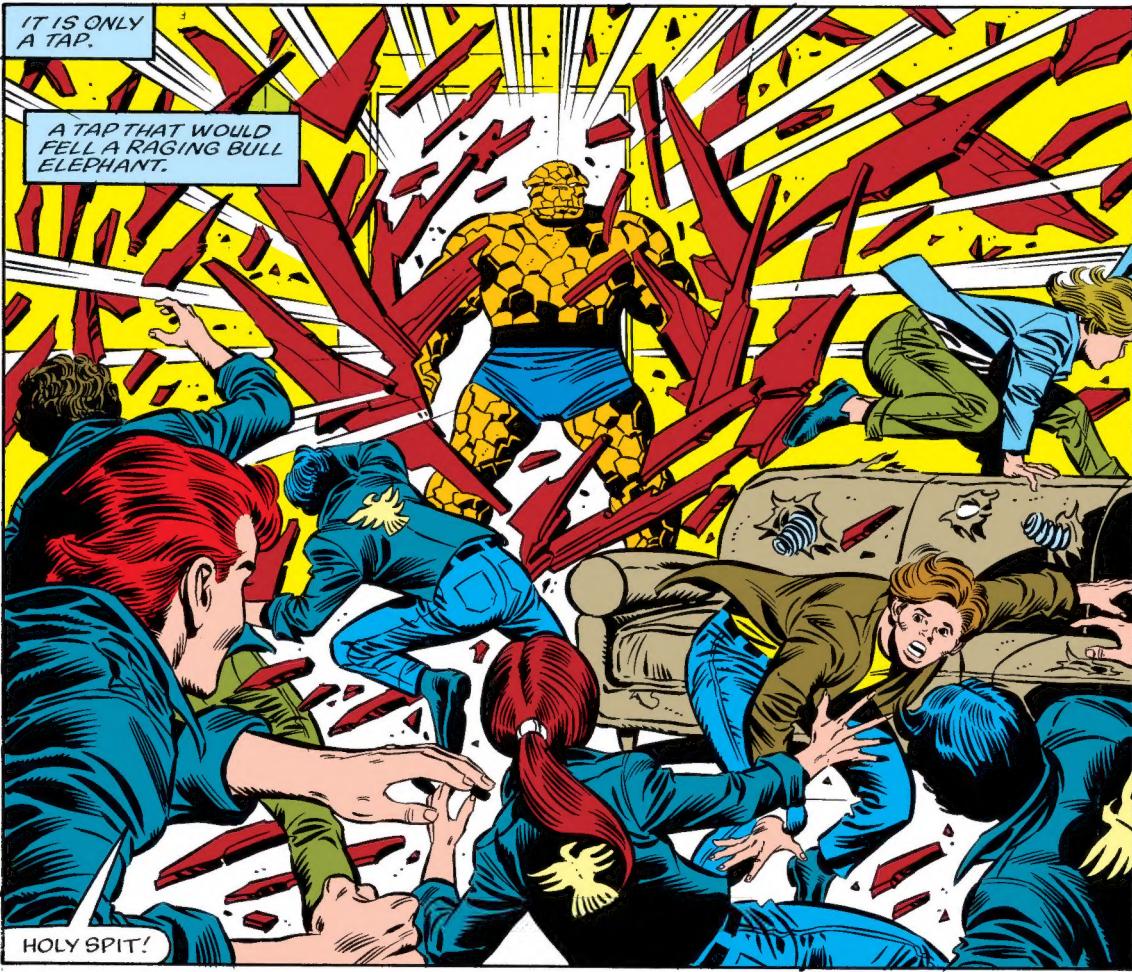
BUT THEY  
HOLD.

A SUDDEN FOREBODING  
GRIPS HIM. IN HIS LIFE BEN  
GRIMM HAS RARELY KNOWN  
THE SPECTER OF FEAR, BUT  
HERE, NEAR SMOOTHERING IN  
A WEB OF ANCIENT PAIN--

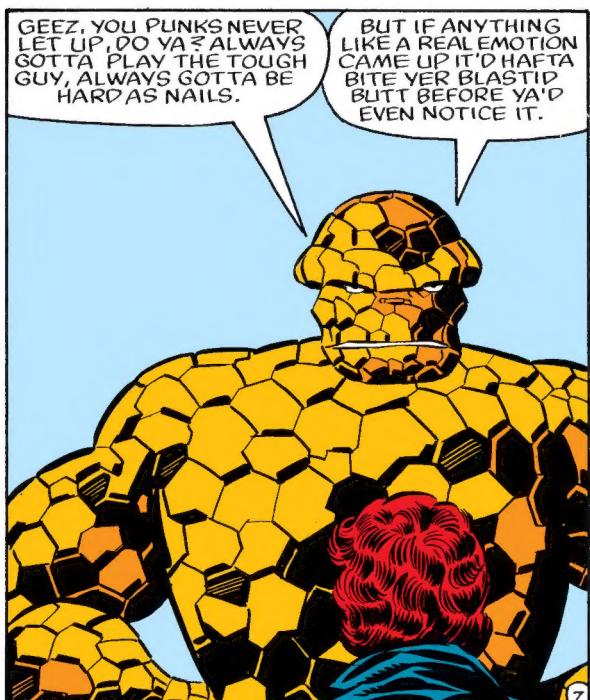
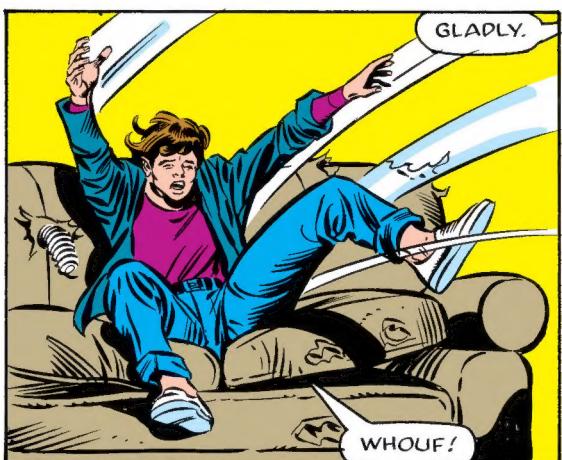
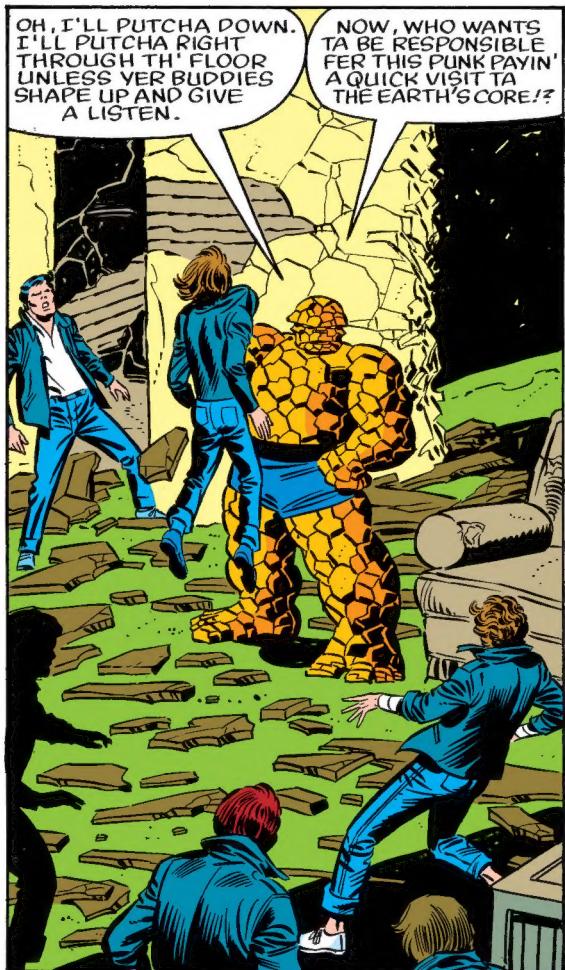
THE WOODEN STEPS  
CREAK IN PAINFUL  
PROTEST UNDER HIS  
FOUR HUNDRED POUNDS...

THE THING  
DESCENDS INTO  
DARKNESS.









DON'T LAY YER FANCY TALK  
ON US, SUPER-HERO. THEM  
WORDS MAY MEAN SOMETHING  
WHEN YA GOT A FULL BELLY  
AN' LOTS A BUCKS, BUT DOWN  
HERE THEY'RE JUST  
CHICKEN-SPIT.

NOW YOU  
LISTEN...

WHY 'N'CHA FLY ON  
BACK T'YER RITZY PAD IN  
THE BAXTER BUILDIN';  
MAYBE THE EARTH NEEDS  
SAVIN' AGAIN. MAYBE SOME  
BIG BAD SUPER-VILLAIN'S  
LOOKIN' TA GIVE YA A  
KICK IN TH' PANTS.

SAVE IT, PAL. WE  
ONLY LISTEN TO OUR  
OWN KIND, SEE? AND  
YOU AIN'T ONE OF US.  
SOMETIMES I DON'T  
BELIEVE YA EVER  
WERE.



THE SMILE IS  
INSOLENT, DRIVING  
A COLD WEDGE  
INTO BEN GRIMM'S  
HEART. THE FLOOD-  
TIDE OF MEMORY  
PEAKS AND  
THREATENS TO  
WASH HIM  
AWAY.



THEN:

PLUNK, I'VE PINCHED OFF  
GUYS HEADS FOR LESS THAN  
THAT. AN' THAT WAS BEFOREH,  
COSMIC RAYS TURNED ME  
INTA A ROCKY ORANGE  
MONSTER.



WHY DON'T YOU JUST  
BLOW AWAY, UGLY? YOU  
GOT NOTHING TO SAY  
TO US.

THERE AIN'T NOTHING  
WE WANNA HEAR  
FROM TRAITORS.

...WHAT...?



YOU HEARD ME, BLUE EYES.  
YER A TRAITOR. YOU AN'  
ALL THEM OTHER FANCY-  
PANTS DO-GOODERS THAT  
QUIT YANCY STREET--THAT  
BETRAYED TH' CODE.

THE WORDS SEND ICICLES  
THROUGH BEN GRIMM'S  
BLOOD, SO FAMILIAR, SO  
TERRIBLY, DREADFULLY  
FAMILIAR.

THE YOUTH'S EYES  
BURN INTO HIS, AND  
FIFTEEN YEARS OF  
PAIN AND ANGUISH  
SEETHE BEHIND  
THESE EYES. SO  
SHORT A TIME, SO  
LONG A LIFETIME.

DEEP WITHIN THE THING,  
THE LONG-LOCKED DOOR  
SWINGS OPEN. THE HIDDEN  
DEMONS STALK AGAIN  
THE CORRIDORS OF HIS  
MIND. HE FIGHTS AGAINST  
STINGING TEARS.

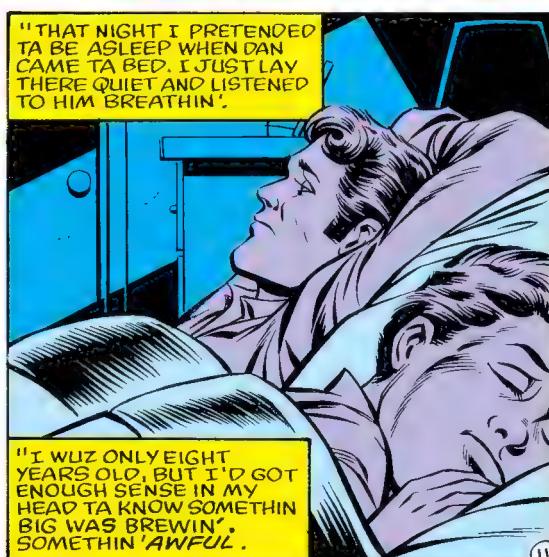
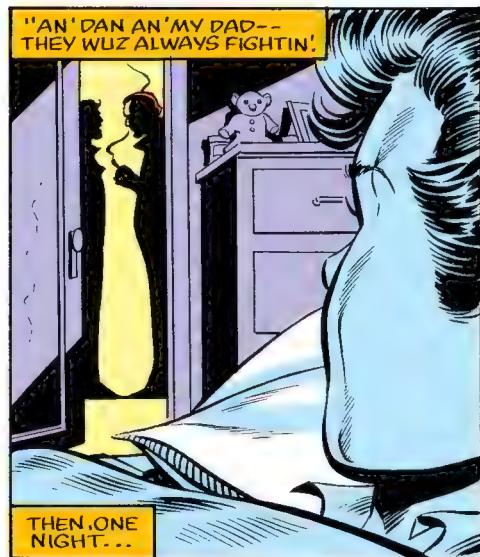
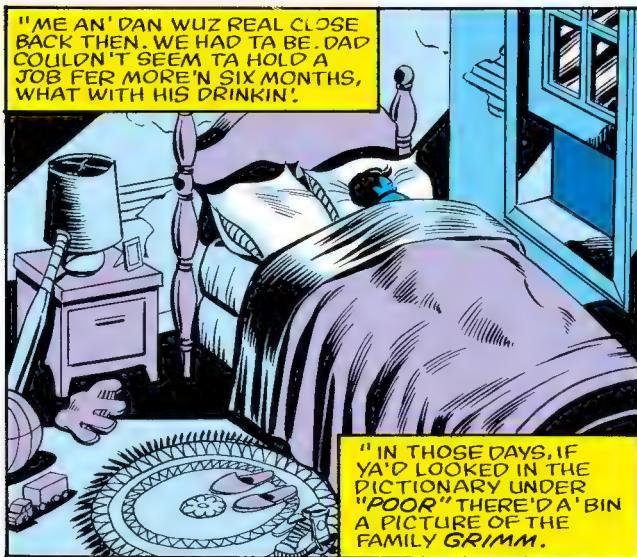
BUT WHEN  
HE FINDS  
HIS VOICE...

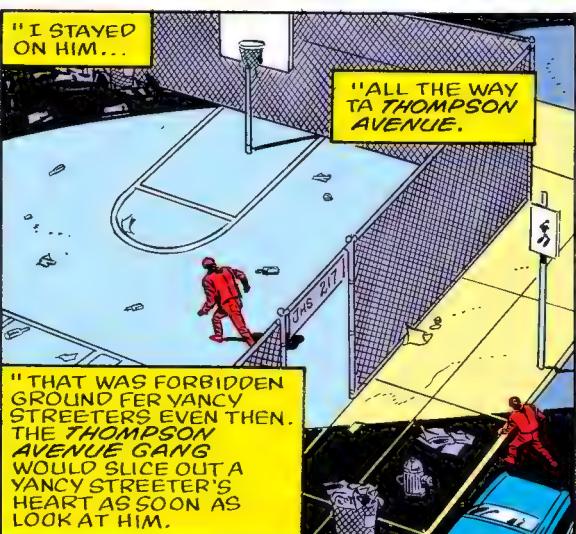
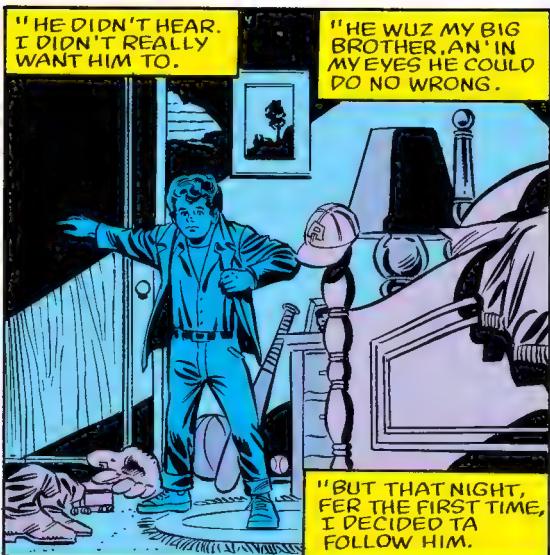
IT IS AS ROCK-HARD  
AND STEADY AS HIS OWN  
UNYIELDING HIDE...

OKAY, PUNKS, GRAB  
SOME UPHOLSTERY. I'M  
GONNA TELL YA A  
LITTLE STORY...

"YA THINK YOU'VE ALL GOT IT SO HARD AN' 'ROUGH HERE, DON TCHA? WELL YOU AIN'T THE ONLY ONE'S WHO EVER GREW UP WITHOUT ENOUGH FOOD IN YER BELLY, OR WEARIN' THIRD TIME HAND-ME-DOWNS."









"DEATH HAD NEVER BEEN REAL TA ME BEFORE THAT MOMENT.

"OH, I REMEMBER MY MOTHER CRYIN' WHEN SHE GOT THE LETTER FROM THE OLD COUNTRY. SAVIN' HER OWN MOTHER HAD PASSED ON, BUT THAT WUZ WORDSON PAPER. JUST WORDS ABOUT SOMEONE I'D NEVER MET.

"THIS WUZ REAL. THIS WUZ DAN.

"I DID THE ONE THING I KNEW NOW DAN WOULD NEVER HAVE WANTED ME TA DO.



"I SWORE, THEN, I CUSSED ALOUD FER THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE. I CUSSED YANCY STREET, I CUSSED THOMPSON AVENUE. I CUSSED AGAINST MY DAD.

"I EVEN CUSSED AT GOD.



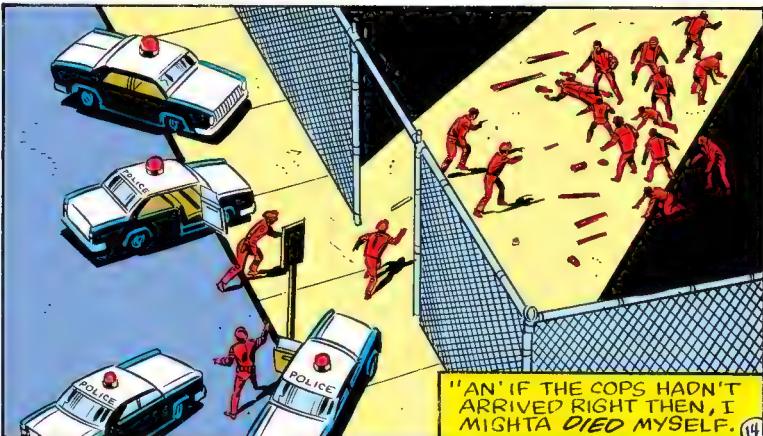
"AN' WHEN I WAS FINISHED...

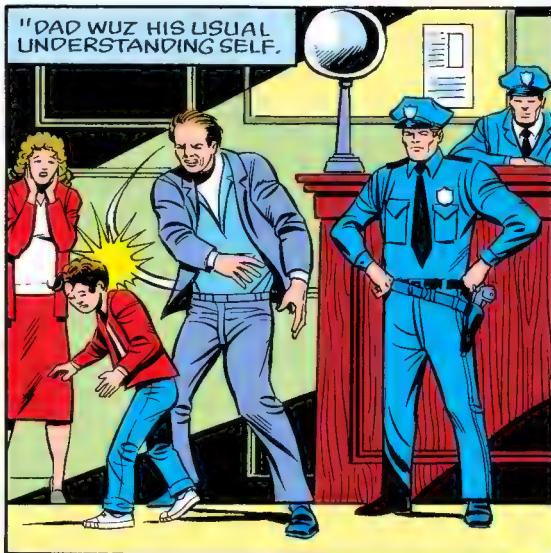


"I FOUGHT.



"AN' IF THE COPS HADN'T ARRIVED RIGHT THEN, I MIGHTA DIED MYSELF.







"GIVE CREDIT TO 'EM, UNCLE JAKE AN' AUNT ALYCE WERE THE CLOSEST THING TO A REAL FAMILY I'D HAD SINCE DAN DIED.



"OR THEY WOULD A BIN IF MY STUPID, SENSELESS PRIDE HADN'T KEPT GETTIN' IN TH' WAY.



"BUT THEY KEPT AT ME. THEY KEPT GIVIN' ME STUFF, THE GOOD LIFE.



"AN' FINALLY I STARTED TO STRAIGHTEN OUT.



"THEY GOT ME INTA HIGH SCHOOL. I DISCOVERED EDUCATION WUZN'T SUCH A BAD THING.



"AN' I DISCOVERED FOOTBALL.



"THERE WUZ STILL A LOT OF ANGER INSIDE ME. THE DEATH OF DAN, THE DEATH OF MY FOLKS.



"FOOTBALL GAVE ME A RELEASE.



"AN' MORE.

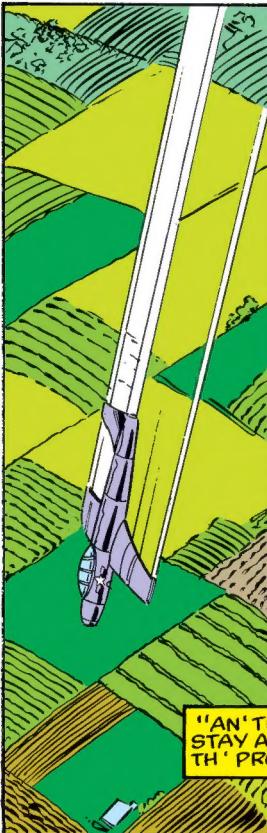
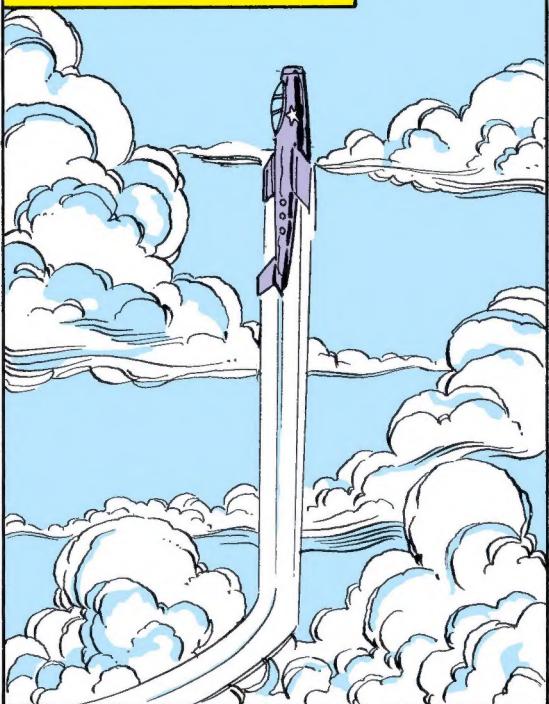


"I DID END UP FLYIN', TOO, THOUGH IT WUZ THE FURTHEST THING FROM MY MIND THAT DAY I FIRST MET REED.

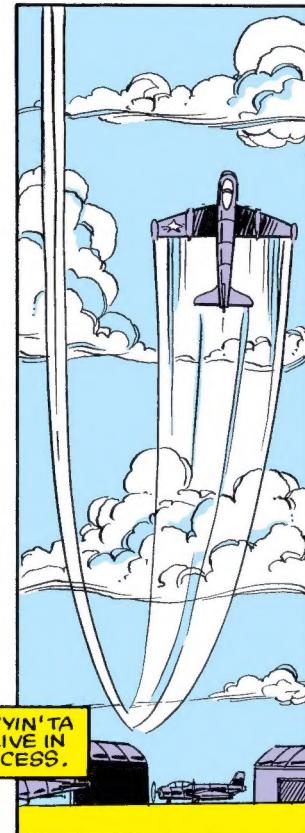
"BEFORE YA KNEW IT I WUZ A JET-JOCKEY, HANGIN' MY TAIL OUT OVER THE EDGE, TRYIN' TO FIND OUT WHAT WUZ WRONG WITH THE NEW BIRDS THE BIG BRAINS KEPT BUILDIN'.



"I WOUND UP IN THE AIR FORCE-- PART OF THE TEST PILOT PROGRAM.



"AN' TRYIN' TA STAY ALIVE IN TH' PROCESS.



"AN' THEN THE DAY I MUSTERED OUT, AN OL' FAMILIAR FACE REAPPEARED.

I'VE COME TO HOLD YOU TO YOUR PROMISE, BEN.

PROMISE? WHAT PROMISE?



I'VE BUILT MY ROCKET. YOU'RE THE ONLY MAN ON EARTH I'D WANT TO FLY IT.

